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G. Chen

Shirley H. M. Reekie

San Jose State University, shirley.reekie@sjsu.edu

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Chi Gong – An Exercise for Internal Health

Gong Chen, Ed.D. and Shirley Reekie, Ph.D.

What Chi Gong is. Chi Gong (official name called Qi Gong, but often called Chi Gong in the United States), "the manipulation of vital energy", is a unique Chinese exercise for internal health. It is significantly different from most regular exercises (such as weight training, aerobic dancing, or jogging) and sports or activities. Most existing exercises or sports intend to improve external fitness—such as strength, endurance, or flexibility. In other words, they basically work on muscles, bones, and the heart. Chi Gong, however, is an exercise system for internal organs (brain, heart, lung, liver, stomach, spleen, pancreas, gallbladder, intestines) and internal systems (nervous, pulmonary, circulatory, digestive, and immune). Since most mortality is caused by internal organ or system problems, exercise for internal health should play an important role in the prevention of health problems. In Chinese traditional medicine, Chi Gong also has been used as a therapy for many internal organ problems, and a variety of other conditions including cancer and AIDS. Besides its exercise and therapy functions, Chi Gong has also been applied in relaxation, stress reduction, sport training, art performance, martial arts, and academic performance.

How Chi Gong works. The mechanism of Chi Gong in the promotion of health is to open all meridians (in Chinese it is called *Jing-luo* which are channels through which vital energy flows) in the human body so that the Chi (vital energy) can flow smoothly along the meridians. The flow of Chi can regulate body conditions, balance *Yin* and *Yang* (positive and negative energy) in the organs, improve metabolism, and increase self-treatment functions. The technique to open the meridians is the combination of selected movement, purposeful breathing, and meditation (mental visualization). Chinese traditional medicine believes that opened meridians in the body bring perfect health while blocked or weakened Chi flow usually reflects health problems and can shorten the life span. The basic function of the purposeful movement is to warm up the vital energy channels, while the function of correct breathing is to help relax and concentrate, and the function of meditation is to use mental visualization and concentration to combine these three elements to activate the Chi for internal health. Actually, Chi Gong works in a similar way to acupuncture, except in acupuncture needles are used to activate the Chi, while in Chi Gong the combination of the above three components is used to move the Chi.

History and future. As a valuable part of the Chinese culture, Chi Gong has 3,000 years of history as a form of exercise for longevity, but it was originally practiced in private places such as homes and temples. It was not a popular public exercise until 1980 when a revolutionary form—"Crane" Style Chi Gong—was created. Now Chi Gong has become the most popular form of exercise for internal health and therapy in China. National statistics indicate that at least 50-100 million people practice Chi Gong daily in China.

Chi Gong was introduced to the United States in the 1980s, and it has been growing slowly in mainstream society as a form of meditation exercise. Recently, Chi Gong has attracted a lot of attention in the medical field. It is predicted, however, that in one to two decades, Chi Gong will become the most popular exercise for internal health in this country.

Scientific background. Chi Gong had been an art since it was created thousands of years ago. However, when Chi Gong became popular in public in the 1980s, extensive research was done on the basic theories and the effects of Chi Gong as an exercise and therapy. The research has brought significant findings. The vital energy meridians (which were thought to be imaginary vital energy channels)

have been found existing in the human body, and the Chi (vital energy) has been successfully measured by scientific equipment. These findings indicated the scientific foundation of Chi Gong. Research also found that Chi Gong has significant effects on the prevention and treatment of many health problems and chronic diseases, and on the improvement of internal health without negative side effects. Many physiological and molecular changes have been measured during Chi Gong exercise and therapy.

Chi Gong and Tai Chi. Tai Chi has become very popular in the United States and has merged into American culture, while Chi Gong is still new to most Americans. Chi Gong and Tai Chi have something in common but they are two different kinds of exercise. Chi Gong and Tai Chi have similar functions as exercises for internal health, since both of these exercises use three components—movement, breathing, and meditation to activate the vital energy—although they emphasize different elements. The major difference between Tai Chi and Chi Gong is that Tai Chi also is a form of martial art while Chi Gong also functions as a therapy.

Who can practice Chi Gong. Chi Gong can be performed by anybody, young or elderly, people with or without disabilities, male or female, healthy people or people with health problems. Unlike most sports or activities, Chi Gong does not require specific facilities, equipment, or partners, it does not require strength, speed, flexibility, endurance, or quick reactions. It does not have any body contact like many other sports, so it is very safe for people with a certain disability to participate. Anybody, after a short training, can be successful at performing it on his/her own. It is very individualized, and performers can select the movements they wish and they can do it at their own pace.

Styles. Chi Gong has many styles featured by their leaders and inventors. The most popular Chi Gong styles with nationwide participation in China include Crane Style, Five-Animal Style, An Style, One-Finger Zen Style, Go Style, and Tai Chi - Chi Gong Style which combines Tai Chi's movements and Chi Gong's principles.

Learning Chi Gong. The Chi Gong learning process includes three stages. The first stage focuses on the combination of purposeful body movement and control, deep relaxation, regulation of breath, and meditation (visualization of Chi movement) to open the meridians. Unlike other exercises and sports which usually require years of practice and training, the first stage of Chi Gong can be as short as several months, weeks, or days depending on the individual learner. Usually, a couple of months can be enough for most learners to learn the basic skills and forms as an exercise. The second stage emphasizes activating one's own internal Chi (vital energy) through meridians. After regular practice in stage one, one usually can feel the internal Chi movement, and open major meridians. The performer then can activate his/her own vital energy and move the Chi through the meridians to treat physical problems and diseases. This stage is what most Chi Gong performers like to achieve and usually take several months or weeks. The third stage is that one is able to generate external Chi (this is common only among Chi Gong masters). External Chi can be used to help other people activate their Chi and in most cases treat other people's problems as a therapy. This stage usually needs years of practice.

Chi Gong, however, is not some kind of magic power which you can master in a morning. Patience is a very important factor in learning Chi Gong. Practice of this exercise should concentrate on

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"(D) the development and implementation of character education programs, as a component of a comprehensive drug or violence prevention program, that are tailored by communities, parents and schools; and

"(E) comprehensive, community-wide strategies to prevent or reduce illegal gang activities;

"(5) supporting 'safe zones of passage' for students between home and school through such measures as Drug- and Weapon-Free School Zones, enhanced law enforcement, and neighborhood patrols;

"(6) acquiring and installing metal detectors and hiring security personnel;

"(7) professional development for teachers and other staff and curricula that promotes the awareness of and sensitivity to alternatives to violence through courses of study that include related issues of intolerance and hatred in history;

"(8) the promotion of before- and after-school recreational, instructional, cultural, and artistic programs in supervised community settings;

"(9) drug abuse resistance education programs, designed to teach students to recognize and resist pressures to use alcohol or other drugs, which may include activities such as classroom instruction by uniformed law enforcement officers, resistance techniques, resistance to peer pressure and gang pressure, and provision for parental involvement; and

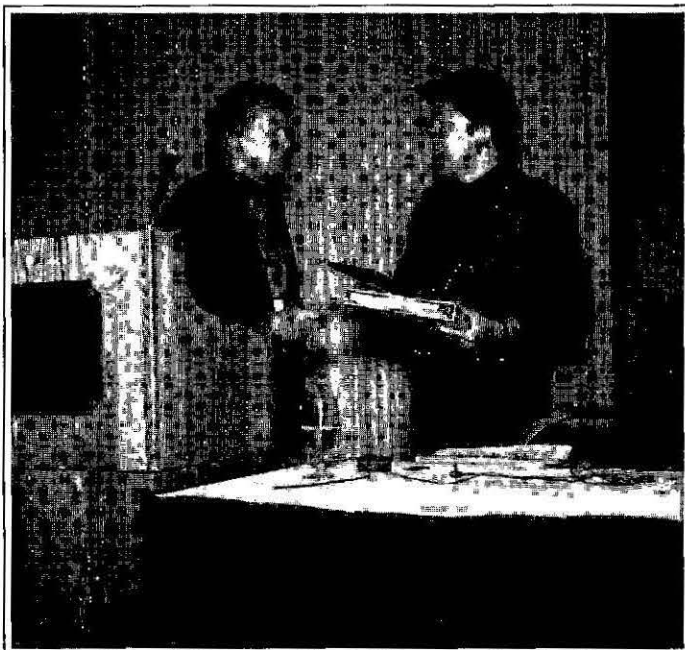
"(10) the evaluation of any of the activities authorized under this subsection.

"(c) LIMITATIONS. —

"(1) IN GENERAL. — Not more than 20 percent of the funds made available to a local educational agency under this subpart may be used to carry out the activities described in paragraphs (5) and (6) of subsection (b).

"(2) SPECIAL RULE. — A local educational agency shall only be able to use funds received under this subpart for activities described in paragraphs (5) and (6) of subsection (b) if funding for such activities is not received from other Federal agencies.

"(d) ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS. — Notwithstanding any other provisions of law, any funds expended prior to July 1, 1995, under part B of the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986 (as in effect prior to enactment of the Improving America's Schools Act) for the support of a comprehensive school health program shall be deemed to have been authorized by part B of such Act."



both the product (a healthy body) and the process (daily healthy experience). Usually the process is more important because it actually improves the internal health, and one can enjoy it everyday.

Chi Gong and physical education. As a new form of exercise for internal health, Chi Gong should become an important part of physical education. As Chi Gong is becoming popular in the United States, there will be an increasing need for qualified Chi Gong instructors and curricula in schools and communities, and there will be an increasing need for research, too. Therefore, the physical education profession should take a strong leadership role in the promotion of Chi Gong in this country, and not wait for other professions to take this territory away.

Gong Chen and Shirley Reekie are faculty members in the Department of Human Performance at San Jose State University.

Chi Gong Workshop

CAHPERD and the Center for International Sport and Human Performance at San Jose State University are offering a one-day workshop on Saturday, April 8, 1995 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. to introduce the most popular Chinese exercise form for internal health and therapy. Participants will be able to perform basic Chi Gong skills for their own internal health and teach basic level Chi Gong as a lifetime exercise. Maximum enrollment has been set at 60, and the **pre-registration deadline is April 1, 1995**. Fees for CAHPERD members = \$20; non-members = \$30. A video tape will be available at a discount price of \$8. Parking is available for \$2 in the 7th Street parking garage on the SJSU campus. Workshop details and a registration form can be secured by contacting Shirley Reekie at 408/924-3010.

Eastin Named Legislator of the Year

For her consistent and proactive support of CAHPERD issues, and for her personal habits which model an active, healthy lifestyle, the Executive Committee, upon recommendation of the Legislative Committee, approved the nomination of Delaine Eastin, Superintendent of Public Instruction, as CAHPERD Legislator of the Year for 1994. Prior to her election to California's highest post in K-12 education, Eastin served as Chair of the Assembly Education Committee. Among other bills which were heard during her tenure in this position was the infamous "Hart bill", SB 2001, which was designed to permit the substitution of athletics for physical education in high school. CAHPERD members who testified were witness to the skillful and articulate manner in which Delaine Eastin convinced the Committee to defy the usually indefatigable Senator Gary Hart and defeat this proposal.

Superintendent Eastin is an avid jogger and attempts to hit the pavement five days a week, because "it makes me feel better." During the Health Framework Conference last January, Superintendent Eastin was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation from CAHPERD by Executive Director Phyllis Blatz. It is anticipated that Eastin will receive her Legislator of the Year award on Sunday, March 3rd during the first general session at the CAHPERD state conference in Santa Clara.